

# Criminal Virtues

by pearypie

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Summary: Sebastian Michaelis reflects on the follies of man, the delicacy of the human soul, and the Earl of Phantomhive. / A frail, cobalt eyed nobleman (whose throat was so very breakable) was ordering him to and froâ€”and he, the demon of more than a thousand years, completed each task with all the obedience of a well trained hound. It was funny.

## 1. Obsidian

What was youth but nature's first folly? A fickle, undecided thing that instills in children wavering hearts and unsteady rhythms. Sebastian thought the whole notion of youth whimsicalâ€”an epoch of great and troublesome burden for both child and caretaker. His young master was wise beyond his years but that childish implacability was still there and, at times, he found it amusing.

A frail, cobalt eyed nobleman (whose throat was so very breakable) was ordering \_him \_to and froâ€”and he, the demon of more than a thousand years, completed each task with all the obedience of a well trained hound.

It was \_funny. \_

Sebastian thought it was the funniest thing in the entire worldâ€”the best jape the universe could have devised. A contract, a bound markâ€”that was all it took. Oh, his master's suffering had been absolutely decadent as he withered in that cage; a shot of liquified diamond in the midst of charcoal gunmetal. What beauty! Surely there wasn't prose fine enough to describe the brutal loveliness of Ciel Phantomhive's crucifixion. Apple white skin lacerated with scars, midnight hair feathered and ruffled by the rough hands of man; the hollows of his cheeks and the pain in his eyes. He was the sweetest fruit on the vine and Sebastian had been the one to pluck it.

Now, all he needed to do was wait and, truth be told, his master was entertainment enough.

Absolutely hellbent on ushering out all happiness so that when the time came, there would not be a shred of light for Sebastian to devour. Even still, his soul burnedâ€burned the darkest shade of blue, tinged with wandering slivers of pearl silver and swirling nebulae of starry ink. Sometimes, in his quieter moments, Sebastian wondered what it'd be like to sample that heavenly soulâ€just a taste. An appetizer before the main course.

Would it be as sweet as the fianc e who so adored him?

Would it be as rich as the ground on which he tread?

Would it be as savory as the blood he spilled?

Or would it simply be \_him, \_the Earl of Phantomhive, in all his broken glory. Resplendent in ermine and delicate as silk; the servitude Sebastian engaged in only heightened his awareness, cognizant of the eden before him.

\* \* \*

><p>"And we must repeat this once again, young master. It will not do to rush through Strauss's fourth stanza like that. You must remember the light bounce and trill of the Kaiser Waltzâ€it echoes in harmony; the crescendo builds." Sebastian tapped a thin black baton against his master's music stand, eyes laughing but mouth firm. "Come now, you wish to impress the Lady Elizabeth do you not? Serenade her as she comes bounding down the hall."<p>

"I don't want to do this period." He snarled but dutifully raised the violin back up to his shoulder, tucking the instrument under his chin as he raised the bow. "What measure?"

"The second will do."

Yet before a single note could be played, the library doors were thrust open and outside stood a flustered and panicked Finnian clutching a crumpled white envelope. "This just arrived for you young master!" He ran forward, nearly tripping over his own two feet, hand raised as he waved the letter about.

Sebastian suppressed a sigh of frustration, stepping in front of the earl and easily forcing the letter away from the boy's strong grip. "Thank you." The butler gave a sharp nod, cherrywood eyes cold with disapproval as Finnian cowered. Didn't anyone in this manor know any better? Music lessons ran from ten to eleven, followed by a rich tea interlude before expense reports were looked over and then, dinnertime. Was that really such a difficult concept to grasp? \_Surrounded by inadequacy. \_He mused silently, guiding Finnian back towards the double doors before slamming them shut in front of the blonde boy's face.

He collected himself, straightened his already impeccable posture, and walked back towards Ciel who was now seated behind that rosewood monstrosity again.

"Forgive the intrusion, young master, but a letter from her majesty." He smoothed out the crumpled parchment to reveal a single red wax seal, emblazoned with the British crown.

Ciel's brows furrowed. "So soon?" He questioned but then smirked. "I see the underground is preparing for spring as well. What a treat, wouldn't you say Sebastian?"

"Indeed."

\* \* \*

><p>And so the day progressed, just like that. There was no commentary to be found that would appear outwardly comical but to the demon, there was a slight catch in every phrase that made him smile. The self importance of these humans was staggering but not at all unexpected. In due time, all species would take for themselves a crown and sword, calling their own name instead of king and country. Wasn't that how revolutions were fought? When one man stoked the fire until it consumed him wholly.<p>

Ah, the joys of idealism. Such a pretty, fragile thing. Once, when Sebastian lived some five or so hundred years ago, a human woman had called him devoid of sentiment, romance, and human kindness. She expected it to hurt or trigger an epiphany but all it did was amuseâ€"she'd been a vain, selfish creature who praised her own beauty and expected men to do the same. Sebastian had little time for women such as herself, particularly since his master at the time had been a diplomat with very little spare time. Always rushing between France and Spain; to and fro they went, back and forth. He quickly saw that in spite of the linguistic and cultural differences between the two countries, hunger and strife remained consistent.

It was why his current master was such an intrigue. Sent to decimate the scourge of the underworld while he himself rotted in a hellish prison of his own making. What splendor, what radiance! Demons in general had no regime to follow; they were free flowing and survived independent of one another. To have such a strict young master was a great joy for Sebastian, for Ciel Phantomhive was someone who seemed determined to both shut him out and let him in. The young lord would not convey his private thoughts to him but Sebastian needed to know the mindset of his liege. There would be no bouts of pointless banter yet every word spoken between master and servant was of the utmost importance, weighed down by death and promise.

There was nothing binding the two together (save death) and it hadn't been until now that Sebastian caught the irony in it.

\* \* \*

><p>Porcelain skin, sapphire eyes, rose quartz lips. If his master were a sculpture, these jewels would comprise his face alone; his body would be black obsidian, able to glimmer under the silver moonlight. There would be Michelangelo on hand to do the Phantomhive countenance justice and Sebastian would remain hidden, watching as each curve and dip was brought to life. There were certain aesthetics about his young master he particularly enjoyedâ€"the first and foremost being his skin. Pale and thin, like the petal of a white dahlia. It was so unlike his master's true nature; cold and steely, unyielding as the clock tower, remorseless as Valmont.<p>

When Ciel had taken ill sometime ago, Sebastian had stood over his ailing body with a sort of curious apathy. It was strange to see his

lord and commander so desperately alone, fighting a battle he could not help him with. His body had always been sickly, a final gift from his deceased mother, but the demon was grateful for the boy's physical foible—it made his mind that much sharper; his wit, that much quicker. How enjoyable their repartees could be when words had actually been exchanged, flowing from one mouth to the other. It passed the time better than wandering through the bowels of the underworld.

Much better.

That, the butler supposed, was why he had soaked cool, wet washcloths and laid them over his young master's forehead. Why he had tucked his arm under Ciel's shoulders, gently hosting him up so the little lording could take a sip of spiced apple tea and regain some much needed color on his bloodless face. Mey-Rin supplied fresh sheets and blankets and Finnian had dug out medicinal herbs and flowers from the vast Phantomhive garden. All of this was necessary to the butler's role: that of caretaker and caregiver.

So he didn't quite understand why, on the third day of his lord's illness, he had taken a pale blue vase imported from Marseilles and filled it with a bouquet of freshly cut belladonnas. Almost unconsciously, Sebastian placed the vase beside his master's bedside table and went on to brew another cup of spiced tea.

Lord Phantomhive awoke some hours later, drowsy and a little irritated as he looked around his darkened room. "Well." He demanded, voice scratchy from ill use, "how long has my body betrayed me?"

"Three days since you last entered your office, my lord." Sebastian replied, never missing a beat as he continued his elegant approach, a silver tray in his hands. "And now that you're well and awake, I'm sure you do not need me to feed you?"

A look of horror shadowed Ciel's blue eye but it dissipated as quickly as it appeared. "Nonsense." He motioned for the tray to be set down. "I've been eating alone since I was three. Maidservants tired me and I despised their coddling." He raised a pearl embedded spoon. "Is this?"

"Miso soup. Light enough for your stomach to hold, nutritious enough to nourish the body." He bowed. "My lord."

"Has anything happened between these few days that I need to know about?"

"Not in the least. Everything has been handled and I have taken the liberty of informing Lady Elizabeth of your disposition. She was quite worried and wished to come over immediately but was stopped by Lord Edward, who feared that she may contract your same sickness." He gave a short bow. "She sent over an exquisite bouquet of carnations and camellias which I have placed in your study."

"And?"

"A stuffed rabbit she has named Lapin." Seemingly out of nowhere, Sebastian produced a fluffy white toy rabbit with exquisite blue stone eyes and a pretty pink ribbon tied round its neck. "She sewed

it herself."

His master looked at the rabbit with a mildly horrified expression but then held out his hand. Observing the rabbit closely, he gave a faint smirk. "Pink thread." He mused quietly, gently turning the stuffed animal back and around before laying it beside him on the bed. "Has her majesty asked anything of me?"

"No sire. She is aware of your illness and wishes you a speedy and efficient recovery."

"And my meetings?"

"All rescheduled to the end of this week." Sebastian gave a low smile. "You may think it presumptuous but I had a feeling you would recover well beyond week's end."

Ciel grimaced. "I'm sure you did. Nowâ€" he paused, having finally caught sight of the vase beside his bed. He sighed with annoyance. "Tell Finnian to leave the belladonnas where they are. I don't want them near me."

"Apologies my lord." Sebastian bowed again. "This was entirely my doing."

The boy looked up, surprised. "Reminding me of my debt?" His master joked wryly. "I assure you demon, it has not been forgotten."

"Oh by no means. The fragrance merely appealed to me."

"Yes. The sweet scent of miasma and deadly nightshade." Ciel derided sourly. "How aromatic."

Sebastian chuckled. "You must be more willing to examine the smaller details of life, young master. After all, death has no flowers for you to admire and oblivion is not exactly a favored tourist destination."

Ciel glared. "Yes, you'd be the expert on ruination and cessation wouldn't you? Hell and all its fires do await you once I'm finished."

"Indeed." Sebastian mused, almost contentedly. "But we had best get you up and ready. No time to wasteâ€"your fiancÃ©e will be here at a quarter to seven to dine with you."

"You told Lizzy I was awake before I was actually awake?!"

"Of course not." Sebastian chided gently. "She wrote this afternoon stating her intentions. I do believe she wants to try her hand at nursing later this evening."

"Well, inform Elizabeth that I am very busy and cannot possiblyâ€"

"It would be poor form to send Lady Elizabeth home. After all, she is to be your wife and you two have not spoken for close to a fortnight. Is that any way to treat a lady?"

Ciel's brow twitched. "I would never want to hurt her

butâ€" "

"Excellent. I shall be sure to prepare a gratin dauphinois for her visit."

"Don't be ridiculous. I won't have Elizabeth catching the remains of my fever."

"You're perfectly well."

Ciel hesitated. "Iâ€|may find myself exasperated by evening's time." He said slowly. The words were a touch unsure and immediately caught the butler's attention. "I shall spend this afternoon working and reviewing some of the tasks her majesty wishes to see completed. And with this lingering ache I am unsure if I can properly entertain Lizzy in the way that she desiresâ€|" he paused, wanting to say more. "To burden her spirit with my enervated form will beâ€|" his jaw clenched and Sebastian did all he could to suppress his smirk.

\_So here lies the crux of his dilemma. My young master, wishing to appease his fiancÃ©e and fearing that he will become too tired by evening's end to properly spend time with her. Sentimental and foolishâ€|but so lovingly cultivated. \_

Sebastian turned to the cup of spiced tea on the silver serving tray. "You'd best drink up young master." He handed the teacup over to him. "You'll need your strength for the rest of his evening."

"Butâ€" "

"I trust that the Queen's Watchdog is capable of persevering through a single dinner. After all, this is Elizabeth, the lady you have known since childhood. Her company has always left you revitalized in my humble opinion and seeing her again after so long might do you some good." He tucked the tray under his arm. "You need put on no airs for her. She is the one constant thing in your life, young master." Sebastian placed his right hand over his chest, deferential to the last.

"Wait." Ciel called, causing Sebastian to look up again with mild curiosity.

"My lord?"

"Lady Elizabeth."

His brows furrowed slightly. "I beg your pardon?"

"Address her as \_Lady \_Elizabeth. You need not be so familiar."

Sebastian smiled, eyes glittering. "Of course my lord. Do forgive me."

Ciel nodded. "Dismissed."

\* \* \*

><p>And so it went, his young master living on borrowed time. A slow,

solemn but elegant procession to hell, trailed by those he loved and loathed in equal measure. Sebastian often wondered what his young master would grow up to be. Physical age did not flavor the soul as emotional bedlam did but he had always been an inquisitive demon, forever examining the small details around him, analyzing the throes of both hell and heaven. Human nature fascinated him the mostâ€"what would Ciel Phantomhive be like in nine or so years? Married to Elizabeth? The Queen's Watchdog still?<p>

Father to a son with a soul as temping as his own? Ah, \_that \_would be a beautiful thing.

Sebastian was rather fond of Lady Elizabethâ€"indeed, she had surprised him in more ways than one and her staunch determination was admirable as was her radiant light. Daughter of the sun she was, wife to winter was what she desired. What would their child be like, the butler often found himself wondering, just before the vesper star rose. Would he be worthy? There was no denying Ciel's own delectability for Sebastian would be rather melancholy following his demiseâ€"but if there was a continuationâ€"well. He would simply have to find a way to extend his lord's revenge, would he not?

Then death would befall the Phantomhives once again, save \_him\_â€"that one precious little boy Sebastian would observe from the shadows until he was ready to be taken.

Then the game would played once again.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- Title comes from de Laclos <em>Les Liasions dangereuses<em>. ("Humanity is not perfect in any fashion; no more in the case of evil than in that of good. The criminal has his virtues, just as the honest man has his weaknesses.")\*\*

\*\* - Kaiser-Waltz: composed in 1889 (a little later than Black Butler I know) by the Austrian Johann Strauss II. It was dedicated in honor of the friendship between Austria (heralded by Emperor Franz Josef) and Germany (ruled by Kaiser Wilhelm II). Translated, this is the Emperor Waltz. \*\*

\*\* - Valmont: referring to Vicomte de Valmont of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' \_Les Liasions dangereuses \_ (or, Dangerous Liaisons; personally, I prefer the book but if I had to pick a film version I'd say the 1988 version with Glenn Close and John Malkovich is best). Valmont is a socially savvy, highly seductive manipulator who uses the weaknesses of women (and anyone else) to his advantage. He plays the game for the fun of it and acts as a match to the equally vicious (if not more so) Marquise de Merteuil - until he falls in love. \*\*

\*\* - "\*\*\*\_\*\*Once...a human woman had called him devoid of sentiment, romance, and human kindness" \*\*\_\*\*- I lifted this line from the film 'On the Waterfront'. It's spoken by the ever lovely Eva Marie Saint as Edie to Marlon Brando's Terry. (Seriously, love this movie.) \*\*

\*\* - Gratin dauphinois: a traditional French dish based on potatoes and crÃ"me fraÃ"che. Very rich and warming (perfect for a winter day). Regionally found in the RhÃ"ne-Alpes. I feel like Lizzy would

enjoy the Rhône-Alpes simply because of how accessible and versatile it is: it's situated between Paris and the Côte d'Azur and borders both Switzerland and Italy - similarly, I see Elizabeth as someone who is quite malleable and would have no problem situating herself in the lives of radically different people. (Ex: Ciel and Edward) So she'll always be a Alps girl to me :) \*\*

\*\*A/N: As always, reviews would be lovely :) I might turn this into a series of interconnected oneshots. Who knows. \*\*

## 2. Valentine

February 14th was a boon to the Funtom Companyâ€”truffles, caramels, and sweets of every flavor were rolled out through silver factories all across England. They were wrapped in tissue paper and packed in shiny red heart shaped boxes, tied with a pale pink ribbon and then, goneâ€”sold to the masses for a commercialized holiday which served only to benefit businesses and whorehouses. In fact, Sebastian was half sure, his young master rather liked the influx of work that came across his desk every second week of February because it distracted him from the inane notion of \_love. \_Oh, how the Lord of Phantomhive would \_sneer \_at that word and all the pretty insincerities it helped cover.

His demon butler, however, rather liked the date. It allowed him to subtly prod and promote insubordination under the guise of friendly servitudeâ€”breakfast would entail heart shaped crepes drizzled with chocolate, stuffed with strawberries, and topped with crÃªme fraÃªche. A mug of hot chocolate, expertly prepared and mixed with cinnamon and clove, would be served in a blood red porcelain teacup, trimmed with gold and decorated with rose blossoms and ivy. Sebastian even exchanged the usual silver serving tray for one of pale rose gold. A slim Russian vase completed the aesthetic, with a single white gardenia in full bloom.

It would be a delightful surprise.

\* \* \*

><p>"What is this." Ciel Phantomhive, lovely as porcelain, cold as sapphire, sneered disgustedly as he glared down at his breakfast. "What <em>is<em> this monstrosity."

Sebastian smiled, bright and cheerful. "Your breakfast, my lord. I've taken the liberty of sprucing it up in honor of the holiday."

The young lord grimaced. "Ah yes," he remembered irritably, "the one day a year where man has a woman's consent to act like a infatuated buffoon and get rewarded for it." He picked up his fork. "How demeaning."

"Yes, indeed." His butler agreed lightly, not sounding all too concerned. "But it would be appropriate toâ€|prepare yourself. Lady Elizabethâ€"

Ciel groaned. "Oh, I nearly forgot. She'll be coming over this evening andâ€”did you get what I asked you to?" He inquired sharply. "Red beryl set in white gold, oval shaped with the Phantomhive and Midford crests intertwined."



"Of course, my lord."

"It'd be easier if Elizabeth just waited until next weekend. Perhaps if I send her enough flowers, she won't come over?"

\_Ah, and here is where your idealism begins to shine through.

\_Sebastian thought mockingly, forcing his features into a sereneâ€"but pityingâ€"smile.

That shut his master up.

He sighed. "Very well. Keep the servants away until 5 this evening. Saint Valentine will be keeping me busy enough as it is."

\* \* \*

><p>At approximately 4:20 PM, Sebastian laid out his lord's evening clothes while the puits d'amour cooled in the kitchens (far, <em>far <em>away from Baldroy's reach). Seemingly out of nowhere (the hidden hallway that interconnected his master's study to his bedroom), Ciel appeared and observed his butler at work. Sebastian chuckled softly; his little lord seemed quite queasy over one simple holiday.

"You seem troubled, young master."

The butler must always be aware, cognizant of his surroundings and the temperament of his liege lord. Today, the usually arrogant earl seemed rather hesitant. \_I wonder what coaxing he'll need this timeâ€"another sweet? A bitter pill? An escape from this world and everything in it? \_"My lord?"

"This might very well be the last Valentine's Day I ever spend with Elizabeth." His master voiced this statement rather blandly and had he not been a demon (and attuned to the Phantomhive ways), Sebastian would have missed it entirely.

That faint warble of hesitation.

"Is it right for me to lead her astray like this? Perhaps things would be easier if I simply ended this engagement altogether. We both know I won't live to see a wedding, much less a future with anyone save Charon and Minos." The blue eyed earl walked over to his four poster bed (made of the finest African black wood) and leaned against it, arms crossed and presence far away. "Is it right for me to break Lizzy's heart? She'd be much better off with someone who isn't bound by obligation and hatredâ€"she'd be a wonderful wife to anyone."

"Anyone but yourself?" Sebastian questioned, holding up two cravatsâ€"one delphinium blue, the other, a deep Persian. \_Hm. Difficult indeedâ€"Lady Elizabeth does like to see the young master in blueâ€"|best to go with the Persian then, as rich and vibrant as the Phantomhive ring. \_

His master reclined his head, eyes now fixed on the high vaulted ceiling. "I don't know. She'sâ€"|she's \_all I have left. \_But I can't expect her to understand what I'm doingâ€""

"You sell your fiancÃ©e short. She's a very capable woman, if given

the chance."

Ciel scowled. "The only person in the world who understands me is you, demon, and that is because of this contract that binds us together. I can't let Elizabethâ€¦" he faltered, swallowing. "I can't let her enter our world. She's meant to stay in the light, meant to smile and laugh and dance to the spring waltz. I won't let this world break her as it did me."

"Then keep her spirits high." Sebastian turned away from his lord's supper attire, their eyes finally meetingâ€"mahogany and sapphire. "Give her as much happiness as you possibly can until the end comes. You and I, my lord, are bound in solemn soliloquyâ€"where you go, I shall follow, ever dutiful and ever faithful. However, the human plane is a fascinating structure and it would be a shame if you ignored all its curiosities, as if already in hell." He smiled, the sharp point of his canines evident, even in the receding light. "You are the Queen's Watchdog but do not forget, she is the knight's daughter and a formidable opponent herself."

Sebastian placed one gloved hand on his master's delicate cheek, curved smoothly and delicately as a lily petal. "I have seen many things, scourges and renaissances, and I can assure you, my lord, that damnation need not be singular. Black is but a shade after all, and you mortals do offer us such fascinating shadows." He leaned closer so their faces were only inches apart, an amused smirk curving on his mouth.

His master's hand reached out to touch the exposed skin of Sebastian's wrist, eyes dark and unreadable. "I would rather keep something precious near me." Ciel finally decided and Sebastian couldn't help but chuckle.

"Of course. You are a greedy noble, aren't you?"

"Careful demon, lest you forget who your lord and master is at the moment."

"And what a moment this shall be." Sebastian breathed, hand moving up to cup Ciel's chin. "I would like for this vaudeville to go on a little longerâ€"I want to hear the crescendo build in every act, I want to see the finale come before the velvet curtains close. I would like, young master, that you not give up on life just yet." His grip on Ciel's jaw tightened. "It would make a disappointing meal if you were to fade away so quickly."

The earl's eyes flashed as his frail fingers squeezed Sebastian's wrist with all the strength his human body possessed. "Keep death away from me until the time is right. \_That \_is an order." He hissed and Sebastian detected the faint whiff of dark chocolate and ripe Hudson cherriesâ€"sweetened to perfection. Ciel's hand moved up from the demon's wrist until he was clutching at Sebastian's upper arm, a hint of panic on his beautiful countenance. "Did you hear me, Sebastian? Tell me you've heard."

It amused him that the little lord thought him deaf but Sebastian showed mercy, raising his right hand to his chest in quiet promise. "You need not fear, my lord. So long as I am here, so long as you bear my mark, I shall never allow you to be harmedâ€"neither by Reaper nor humanâ€"until the game is done."

Ciel relaxed, grip loosening as a look of false serenity and genuine steel resurfaced on his face once again. "Good." He declared, voice low, as his eyes "bright and cold" fluttered shut for an all too quick moment. It was odd, Sebastian thought, how he'd grown accustomed to his master's delicate weight being pressed into his arms.

"Allow me to dress you for supper, my lord." Sebastian took a step back, disentangling himself from Ciel while the scent of chocolate and cherries disappeared. He gestured towards the rich silks and satins on the bed. "Lady Elizabeth will be expecting you to look your best."

\* \* \*

><p><em>After all, pleasure's a sin and sometimes sin's a pleasure. <em>Sebastian licked his lips as the young earl escorted Lady Elizabeth into the dining room, his own form trailing behind. Though the Marquess's daughter wore a lovely vermillion gown trimmed in lace, it was his master who personified cool grace. He cut a divine figure in his cobalt surcoat and tails, the heels of his black dress shoes clicking down the hall.

Sebastian had always liked Valentine's Day.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>- In Victorian times, the gardenia symbolized loveliness and secret love. <strong>

\*\* - Red beryl: also called the scarlet emerald; very rare, found only in Utah and New Mexico. Costs range from \$2,000 to \$10,000 per carat. \*\*

\*\* - Charon, ferryman of the Underworld who takes newly deceased souls across the river Styx. \*\*

\*\* - Minos, the final judge of the dead who casts the final vote in determining a person's immortal fate. \*\*

\*\* - Puits d'amour: a French pastry with a hollow center usually filled with red current jelly or raspberry jam. The name carries erotic connotations and literally translates to "well of love". \*\*

\*\* - \_Pleasure's a sin and sometimes sin's a pleasure \_ - writ by the ever eloquent Lord Byron. \*\*

\*\*A/N: Ah, I'm having way too much fun playing with the Ciel and Sebastian dynamic. There's a darkness between them that's both intense and distant, wanting and hating - supple and pliant. \*\*

\*\*Should I continue with this series? Yay? Nay? Go away? LOL\*\*

### 3. Wedding

\*\*A/N: So this is a bit more Ciel/Sebastian than what I usually write

soâ€|if you don't like it, please skip this chapter!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Summer weddings were torrid affairsâ€"horribly stretched out, embellished with useless ceremony while all the guests melted miserably in their silk finery. Men in wool coats with gold buttons and women in whalebone corsets and satin flowers; summer weddings in London emitted a heavy effluvium of thinly veiled pain. The fake, forced smiles while standing in ceremony with shoes that pinched too tightly; hair pulled back until one's scalp screamed mercyâ€"weddings, in general, were awful.<p>

But the Duchess of Brent was an unusual woman; though her mother was a god fearing Catholic, Arabella Blythe herself was possibly part dryadâ€"she \_adored \_nature. Therefore, her entire commemoration was held outside, in the sweltering 90 degree heat in an outdoor botanical garden covered with white lilies and rambling, dark green ivy. It looked lovelyâ€"a home for the flower fairies perhapsâ€"but the stained glass greenhouse combined with noble finery was not a match made in heaven. In fact, the Countess of Langston had to be escorted out while the Viscount Asquith fainted in spectacular fashion, tailcoats flying as his beefy form nearly crushed the thin and frail Duchess of Lyndon.

But not a single member dared complain for the Duchess of Brent was a special case; so special in fact that even the Earl of Phantomhive had emerged from his dark manor to celebrate the occasion. Well, \_celebrate \_may be too light a wordâ€" \_investigate \_was more like it, though no one but the young earl and his butler needed to know that. The queen had grown increasingly concerned with the dwindling number of marriageable bachelorettes after two were found dead, one reported missing, andâ€"right in the midst of thisâ€"the Duchess of Brent had decided to announce her engagement.

The previous two girls who died were from minor noble families; they had no direct relation to the queen or her unsavory side dealings but still, they were part of the aristocracy. The debutante who had gotten kidnapped was another matterâ€"she was the niece to Viscount Verley whose family owned one of the largest glass operations in the London district. It'd been her sudden exodus that alighted the situation into a frenzy, forcing the queen to call upon her ever faithful watchdog who, after learning of the lady's departure, was none too concerned.

He had little time for such frivolitiesâ€"a kidnapping case, shouldn't this go to Scotland Yard? Or perhaps maybe a private detective? But then again, his butler had reminded, these were not ordinary kidnappingsâ€"these were \_noblewomen \_and, indeed, wasn't \_Lady Elizabeth \_also a noblewoman? That had certainly ended his master's protests and he'd launched himself into the case with unparalleled diligenceâ€"until he'd been forced to attend \_this \_wedding.

\* \* \*

><p>Lady Arabella held her reception at her uncle's summer house. The ballroom was a wonderful, romantic conclave of red velvet drapery and gas lamps in the shape of swans. The windows were all stained glass, arched and high, allowing pale pink light to filter in

slowlyâ€”gently illuminating the white marble floor in a heavenly glow. Faint flickers of gold became visible, their mischievous brilliance infecting every last attendee, forcing them to dance in this sacred and hallowed hall of matrimonial bliss.<p>

The young Lord Phantomhive sat obscured in the shadows at an empty table. Around him were five deserted silk chairs and a fine, cherrywood table that looked oddly grotesque with its numerous dishes and cakes. It exuded an uncomfortable ambienceâ€”the same feeling a child gets after consuming one too many sweets: headaches, nausea, and malaise filling every crevice and pore.

The earl, however, looked perfectly at ease; a dainty china teacup (with \_hand painted \_roses) sat in front of him, simmering quietly. His butler, softly smiling, stood behind him. "Ah, here we are once again," the demon murmured amusedly, "you scowlingâ€”ignoring societal decorum as if it meant nothing. In all my years, I've never met a nobleman so opposed to dancing."

"It was too hot in that greenhouse." The earl retorted sharply. "A furnace in all but name. If I didn't know any better, I'd say the duchess was the killerâ€”trying to assassinate everyone through heatstroke."

"Ah, but that would be too clean a death. Our little cutthroat likes playing with his foodâ€”much like you."

Ciel sneered. "I don't see why we had to come to his weddingâ€”the duchess has already married and still no sign of the killer. A waste of my time. Death only follows wealthy, unwed maidensâ€”not newly minted spouses who look absurdly infatuated with one another."

Sebastian hummed in agreement. "Perhaps this mission would have been easier if you'd donned a ballgown again." He chuckled to himself, effectively ignoring his young charge's glare. "I would make a fine suitor, if I do say so myself."

"You?" Ciel crowed in disbelief. "You're a \_demon, \_Sebastian. No woman in her right mind would consent to be your bride."

"How you wound me, young master." He sighed, sounding perfectly distraught. "It would have been a beautiful sceneâ€”perfect bait. No criminal would be able to resist Lady Cecelia, distant cousin to the Earl of Phantomhive. Blood would stain you from head to toe."

"You're not making any sense." Ciel grumbled, thin fingers curling around the delicate handle of his teacup. "They'd recognize me for who I am. Without Madam Red as our shield, I can't pretend to be anyone else." He took a sip of tea. \_Weak. \_He derided, almost gagging at the taste. \_Crushed rose petals and pearlsâ€”disgusting.

—

The feel of his butler's hand against his shoulder caused Ciel to freeze. Sebastian bent down, lips inches away from his ear. "You truly don't know how valuable your lineage is, do you? For centuries, the Phantomhives have been the scourge of the underworld, destroying one organization after another and replacing it with businesses of your own design. Each watchdog is relentless, with no apparent

weakness in sightâ€”a delicate, gentle rose such as Lady Cecelia, no matter how distant a relative she is, would be the perfect target of a hate crime." He leaned in closer and Ciel shiveredâ€”the demon's breath was cool, flavored like intoxicating pear wine that seeped into one's veins far too quickly. "You wouldn't even have to do much to lure them out."

Ciel felt anxious, felt as if he was waiting for something but for the life of him, he didn't know what that something was. His heartbeat began to flutter, like the wings of a hummingbird and for a brief, terrified moment he thought he was going to have an asthma attack.

Roughly, he shoved his butler away, much to the latter's shock. "Don't come so close." The earl ordered harshly, desperately trying to force his heartbeat back down. "Your presence makes me nervous."

Sebastian arched a brow, perfectly entertained. "Do I?" He chuckled, allowing one hand to trail down Ciel's cheek. "You've wrinkled your cravat." He sighed vexedly, placing both hands on the earl's slim waist to turn him around.

"We'll have to infiltrate Viscount Verley's manor after this." Ciel murmured, cobalt gaze unwavering as Sebastian knelt down in front of him, hands coming up to adjust the young master's tie. "His niece was staying with him during the week of her disappearance. Her own family resides in Brighton and from what I know, Verley had a falling out with his brother some time ago. Why would he send for the niece of the man he hates? He wouldn't demonstrate this sort of hospitality unless he had an ulterior motive."

"Which is?"

"Revenge." Ciel answered simply, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "Verley and his brother, the Marquis of Courbet, had a fierce sibling rivalry that extends all the way back to their days at Weston. Verley was in Blue House and Courbet was in Red; they competed in everything though Courbet, by some measure, always bested his younger brother. It probably didn't help that Courbet would inherit the Rutherford title of marquis while Verley had to marry in order to keep his place in the aristocracy. Hatred, vindictive and pure, was the reason and his niece was simply collateral damageâ€”another way to strike back at his all too charmed brother."

Sebastian had finished adjusting Ciel's tie and stood up, looking down on his charge with a deliberate smile. "Very good my lord." He nodded approvingly. "If you knew all this beforehand, why did we even attend Lady Arabella's wedding? Not that it wasn'tâ€”enlightening butâ€”"

"I had to make sure that my conjecture was substantiated." Ciel replied easily, crossing one leg over the other. "I knew if I stayed here for long enough, word would spread that the queen's watchdog was in attendance. Verley has nothing to do with meâ€”he isn't even on the board of consideration. All he wants is revenge and his tactics were obvious. Ladies Rosalind Newfield and Margaret Hamilton were close friends of Verley's niece. Verley needed to isolate his niece from the world, give her reason to come to himâ€”with all the tragedy

lingering around Brighton, why not journey to London to stay with him? Enjoy the season, meet new peopleâ€”find a suitor. These are all the frivolous, childish things every debutante wants. How could she refuse such a generous overture?"

"Ah. By eliminating all holds on her ladyship's former life, Viscount Verley lured her into the lion's den in full view of the public. Verley's status as a patron of the arts and his family's nonexistent connection with the queen enabled further destruction." Sebastian's mahogany eyes glittered. "How interesting humans areâ€”to hate so passionately over something so arid. The intangible, abstract prize of a title."

"Don't forgetâ€”he wanted to be praised as well. To have people laud him instead of his brother." A condescending smirk appeared on the earl's face. "In a way, Verley yearns for public adorationâ€”much like someone else I know."

Sebastian took a step forward, bending down on one knee before his master. Head bowed, he raised his right hand to his chest. "You forget, my lord, that there is only one person's adoration I want."

Ciel scoffed. "Don't play me for a fool."

"As you once commanded, I speak only truth to you." Sebastian raised his head, an enchanting smile on his lips that would have made other women faint and swoon. Ciel simply stared. "You, young master, are my entire beingâ€”both figuratively and literally."

"Yes, yes, I know." The young earl raised a hand. "Without me you would have no reason to wander the mortal plane. Save your monologue for another time."

A faint bout of laughter escaped Sebastian, irritating Ciel all the more. \_Does the demon find \*\*everything \*\*so bloody amusing? \_

"Ah, my lord," he shook his head, "how little you see."

"Pardon?" The little lord raised a brow, incredulous. "You must be drunk. All this public hysteria can't be good for your demon mind. And stand up alreadyâ€”we're leaving."

Sebastian bowed his head once again. "As you wish."

\* \* \*

><p>The carriage ride to Viscount Verley's was a quiet one. His lordship seemed lost in his thoughts and Sebastian wondered if he was worried about infiltrationâ€”it'd been a good while since they visited any detestable nobles and the demon didn't think Viscount Verley had done anything <em>too <em>disastrous. At least, nothing to warrant his manor being burned to smithereens.

"You're quiet this afternoon, my lord." Sebastian diverted, observing how his charge was sitting close to the window, cheek pressed against palm as he gazed out at the blurred scenery.

"I'm thinking." He deadpanned. "Verley will be difficult to pin downâ€”we'll need a confession. The queen won't like hypothesis

alone. She'll want fact."

"Do you plan to torture him until he submits?"

"Perhaps." Ciel smirked. "You'd like that, wouldn't you demon?"

Sebastian sighed, half exasperated, half amused. "I fail to see why you must remind me of my heritage at every opportunity."

"I fail to see why you continue to be insubordinate at every opportunity." He shot back, his petulant tone causing Sebastian to smirk outright. "What are you smiling about now?"

"Merely amused, my lord. Think nothing of it."

"Laughing at my expense?"

"Not at all." Sebastian swore with a look of utmost innocence. "I would never think to be so presumptuous."

Ciel studied him, briefly, eyes narrowing. "So you say." He moved away from the window so that they were now sitting across from one another, face to face. "After this mission is over we'll need to speak to Funtom's head of manufacturing. I've designed a new model of the child's rocking horse which ought to do quite well with the male demographic."

"Very well my lord. I shall write a letter informing Mr. Covington of your decision immediately. And, if I may?"

The question caught Ciel off guard though he collected himself quickly enough. "Proceed."

Without warning, Sebastian transferred seats so that they now sat together, bodies inches apart. Ciel's eyes widened. "Wh-what in blazes do you think you're doing?" He choked out, disturbed by the proximity of his butler.

Sebastian's answering smile was predatory. "My lord," he intoned smoothly, "there's a spot of icing on your cheek, near the corner of your mouth. Would you like for me to remove it?"

His young master looked utterly aghast but then shook his head, determined. "No. I'll do it myself." His tongue darted out, wetting his lips as Sebastian suppressed a chuckle. Ciel let out a slight groan of frustration. "I'm not getting it, am I?"

"Not quite, my lord." He responded, face serene.

Ciel sighed. "I suppose I have no choice." He motioned for Sebastian to continue. "Get on with it."

"Yes, my lord." Without further ado, Sebastian raised his gloved hand to his mouth and gently tugged it off using gleaming white teeth. "I couldn't abide this getting dirty." He explained, at the sight of his lord's incredulous expression. "Now then," he leaned forward, one pale hand coming to touch Ciel's cheek. "Let's get you cleaned up." Cool fingertips danced across the earl's unblemished skin, tickling slightly, before pausing at a pale pink spot of icing near the right



corner of his mouth. "There we are." Sebastian murmured gently, hand swiping down carefully, bringing the icing to rest on the tip of his forefinger.

Smirking, the butler moved so that his hand was now centimeters away from his lord's mouth. "I'm afraid I can't eat this, young master. Demon physiology does not allow for it."

Ciel's cheeks colored, a delicate, rosy flush reddening his face. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

"You do like sweets, don't you my lord?"

"Well Iâ€”yes, but you can't expect me to eat frosting from your hand."

"Not hand," Sebastian corrected, "my finger."

"No."

"Why ever not?"

His lord looked half ready to kill him then and there. "You'reâ€”I meanâ€”this isn'tâ€”"

The butler brushed his forefinger against Ciel's lips, leaving a small trailing of icing behind. Almost unconsciously, his young master's tongue darted out to lick away the sugary confection. Sebastian smiled.

"There. Now open your mouth."

Ciel's face was tomato red by now as he glanced at his butler and then out the window. \_Damn it. We're nearly there. \_With only two more blocks before they reached the Viscount's home, he had no choice.

Obediently, Ciel's lips parted and, after hesitating oh so briefly, closed his mouth around Sebastian's icing covered forefinger. Sucking gently, the earl averted his gaze as a mixture of sweet sugar andâ€”something else flavored his senses. Whatever it was, he didn't want to think about it. It was spicyâ€”almost like cinnamonâ€”but heady too. \_Bourbon?\_ It tastedâ€”\_good. \_

Sebastian, erstwhile, was intrigued. His lord's mouth was warm, silky, and wet; it was a pleasant sensation made even sweeter by his master's furious blush. Smirking, Sebastian swirled his finger around the inside of Ciel's mouth before removing it; glancing down, he saw that the frosting had been cleanly removed.

"Well done, young master."

Ciel, red cheeked and embarrassed, turned away, glaring out the window. "Shut up."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Wasn't going to post this for another week but I couldn't resist. I'm slowly getting sucked into this fandom. Someone help. \*\*

\*\*Now open to drabble requests :) give me a word, situation, or description for me to fanfic! A part 2 of this will be up soon: alternate scenario - Lady Cecelia and her fiancÃ©, Lord Michaelis, attend the Duchess of Brent's wedding. OR: "Dammit, Sebastian, did you have to lace this corset so tightly?" "Well my lord, you do lack a woman's breasts."\*\*

\*\*Yay? Nay? \*\*

#### 4. Ruby

\*\*A/N: Hello beautiful people! In this chapter: Sebastian decides to plant some irises in the garden when he discovers a strange box, decades old, buried beneath the earth. Madam Red flashback.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><em>There is something pagan in me that I cannot shake off. In short, I deny nothing, but doubt everything. <em>- Lord Byron

\* \* \*

><p>My dear nephewâ€" <p>

I don't suppose you'll know who I amâ€"after all, you've only just been born. I held you moments agoâ€"you were so small and fragile in my arms. I was terrified you would cry when you looked up at me but all you did was smileâ€"and it was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Your eyes were bluer than the sapphire sky, just like Rachel's, and you gazed at me with such wonder, positing \_who is this strange woman with red hair and flushed cheeks? \_Well, my dear, darling nephew I am your aunt, Angelina. But please call me Anneâ€"everyone does. I want you to find this letter when you're older, perhaps married and content with children of your own.

Your birth was a revelation to me although I can't explain why. All I know is that once I held you Ciel, it felt rightâ€"your body was soft and radiated warmth, even wrapped under all those layers of cashmere. You seemed to want to speakâ€"demanded the right to be heardâ€"and oh, how that reminded me of myself. Yearning to voice my own thoughts to a careless world, rejected for my beliefs because women are supposed to have none. But it will be different for you Ciel, you'll be able to do wonderful things and I cannot wait to see all that you'll accomplish.

I am but 19 myself, unmarried, and pursuing a medical license much to my own parents horror. Is it so wrong to want to be a doctor? To want to do something meaningful with my life other than chase after men and dance to pointless songs? Oh dearâ€"please ignore that. I'm not yet 20 and already I sound so cynical. I hope you won't become like this when you're my ageâ€"I hopeâ€"I hope that you'll find someone who loves you. I hope you'll let them pursue their dreams in addition to loving you. In fact, if I ever become your spinster aunt, I'll be the one finding matches for you! Although, your Aunt Frances has a daughterâ€"a golden haired little angel named Elizabeth who I think you'll love. She's beautiful Ciel (and if you two happen to be together while you're reading this then, what did I tell you? I am Cupid's arrow after all!).

As I write this I've come to see that I've said nothing of worthâ€”this is one long ramble by a girl who's been completely thunderstruck by your presence. How do you do it, little oneâ€”you're not a month old and already you've got my heart in your hands. I promise Ciel, I'll always protect you and love you and be there for you. Never be afraid to speak to me for I shall always listen. Every word you say means something and every worry you have will be my burden as well. Keep safe and happy dear nephew of mine.

All my love,

Anne

\* \* \*

><p>Sebastian had found the letter not too long ago, buried in a faded and dirtied black wood box beneath the gardens of the Phantomhive Manor. It was mid-March and the weather was breezyâ€”a bit chilly, actually, but the yellow sun was out and it seemed the right time to plant a few bouquets of French irises in the back lot. His young master was busy in his study while the other servantsâ€”bumbling group of fools they wereâ€”had actually made themselves useful cleaning the guest bedrooms. It was a rare moment of peace and quietâ€”and Sebastian wanted to take every advantage of this tranquil prelude.<p>

He certainly hadn't expected a sinner's confession to come into his hands and briefly, the demon wondered why Madam Red buried it. It was old after all; the pages faded yellow and crinkled with time; the smooth black ink looked more grey than anything else. Her handwriting had been deliberate and rushed all at onceâ€”as if she wanted to put every thought she had on paper. Curious.

He'd stopped his planting midway and skimmed through the note, a calculated smirk dancing on his lips. \_Oh Madam Red, \_he pitied, \_so full of potential in a world filled with women of weak spirit and cheap guile. Yet, there you wereâ€”loving a man who could never love you in returnâ€”isn't that Venus's true revue? To plant the notion of attainable affection in man's minds before snatching it away, just as quickly. \_

He chuckled. Demons knew a great deal about loveâ€”after all, it was the tool men sought to \_conquer them by. \_What a lark, what a jape!

A poor safety netâ€”a pitiable inviolability. Thinking that the devil could be kept at bay through \_love.\_ What was it but a defect of the heart?

Yes, Sebastian pitied Madam Red; she had been ever so entertainingâ€”wit and banter on the tip of her tongue, she managed to make humanity look like a theater show. The madame represented every cruel joke of society and satirized it to perfectionâ€”the socialite queen who wielded knives by moonlight, slaughtering prostitutes in an effort to bring back what she lost. Her final elegy.

Killed by a Reaper.

\* \* \*

><p>Using demonic speed, Sebastian finished his gardening with the grace of Artemis's arrow and now walked down to the kitchens. It was around 3 PM and his master would be wanting his midday tea. Stoking the fire, the butler decided on a maharaja chai, delicately spiced, paired with an apricot tartlet.<p>

In front of him, the red and orange flames burned, incased inside the black metal stove. Sebastian stared into those depths with something akin to curiosity. Without a word, he pulled the tattered and faded letter from his breast coat pocket and, with a flourish, threw it into the fire. The flames ate up the offering greedily, devouring the thin, pitiful pages until nothing remainedâ€”only more flames, more fire.

\_Well, \_the butler thought with a satisfied smirk, \_that was that.

—

He didn't need Angelina Dalles giving advice to his young master from beyond the grave. Whatever words she uttered would no doubt be ignored butâ€”why take such a risk? Sebastian had spent years cultivating his lord's soul, carefully preparing it to his liking. The darkness within this blue eyed lord seemed to grow and grow and soon, the demon reasoned, it would spread to every corner of his frail, porcelain body. What might have been redeemable was now gone; with every prod and quip that left Sebastian's lips, the harder and more indistinct his master became.

There wasn't much Sebastian liked in the world around himâ€”oh, there were things he found amusing but nothing he particularly liked. He did, however, enjoy his masterâ€”perhaps that was as close to fondness as a demon could get but it was \_close enough. \_He wanted Ciel Phantomhive to march into the abyss triumphantly, wanted him to die in a splendid, silken fashion. Trussed in pearls and laced with silver liliesâ€”that was how his master would die.

And no one would take that away from him.

Sebastian would see to that.

\* \* \*

><p>The first thing Sebastian saw when he entered the Phantomhive office was that his master was not there. Instead of sitting behind his grand rosewood desk, reading over paperwork and busying himself with acquisitions, Lord Phantomhive was seated on a plush, Persian blue armchair by the fireside, observing a fiery gold and blue painting. Turner's <em>The Slave Ship. <em>

"My lord, your afternoon tea." Sebastian pushed the trolley over to the carpeted inglenook, unbothered by his master's silence. "Today will be a finely spiced Indian tea known as maharaja chai followed by an apricot tartlet, lightly sweetened, and served with clotted cream."

"Fine."

His dispassionate response did little to stymie the butler's cheer. Sebastian served a perfectly round tart onto a Wedgwood

platterâ€"blue and white this time. "You seem troubled my lord."

"I'm not."

"Ah yes, I do forget that the scowl is your usual expression. Forgive me for my absentmindedness."

"You're lucky I don't order you to jump out the window for that comment."

"Piercing glass won't harm me." Sebastian chuckled, giving a short bow as he placed tart and tea on a richly carved pedestal table by his lord's armrest. "Is there anything else you need this afternoon?"

Ciel still refused to face him, eye and eyepatch fixed on the painting in front of himâ€"the one that hung so proudly above the shaded hearth. "No."

"Very well then. Supper will be served at six. My lord." He bowed and turned to leave, carefully debating between a coq au vin or the heartier boeuf bourguignon. \_A difficult choiceâ€"if I do decide on the coq au vin, then it'll be necessary to prepare a gÃ¢teau de mÃ©nage. On the other hand, my young master seems not to have much of an appetite this evening so the bourguignon might be wastedâ€"though if I prepared the boeuf, dessert could be a blackcurrant cake and the little lord \_\_\*\*does \*\*\_\_enjoy blackcurrantâ€"| \_

Tedious. It was all very tedious.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: This was more of a character study regarding Sebastian's view of Madam Red but oh well. (I really, really miss her and wish Grell hadn't killed her even though it added to Ciel's character development but UGH. Madam Redâ€"WHY.) Next drabble: Lady Cecelia and Lord Michaelis attend the Duchess of Brent's wedding.  
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\*\* - Also, J.M.W. Turner is one of my absolute favorite painters so if you see anymore references to him in my fics, you'll know why :)  
\*\*

End  
file.